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Program Record Filing and Retention

The focus of any record keeping system is document retrieval. Therefore, records should be filed and maintained in a manner that facilitates easy retrieval, indexing to allow for uniformity in program administration and the appropriate level of security for confidential information.

For ease in program management, keep different program files separate. This may be done physically by keeping the records in separate file drawers or cabinets or by indexing with colored file folders or colored file labels. Files may be organized alphabetically by facility name or numerically by street address. It is essential to file records by name, address or other permanent trait of the facility. Whatever filing system a local public health agency chooses, it should provide for easy and accurate record retrieval.

Onsite sewage projects are often filed by location (mailing address/city or zip code) and the name of the owner. Confusion can occur if projects are filed by the name of the installer or engineer. It is better to organize files by the name of the property owner.

It is important to remember that local public health agency's files are permanent records even when projects are done under contract with the Department of Health and Senior Services. Local public health agencies may wish to adopt record retention periods similar to those used by the Bureau of Environmental Regulations and Licensure (BERL).

Nearly all programmatic records maintained by BERL are retained for a maximum of three years with the following exceptions:

Environmental Program	Retention Timeframe
Lead environmental investigations	5 years
On-site sewage loan evaluation reports	5 years
Sewage permit applications/plans, engineering reports, variance requests, perc test or soil evaluation reports and inspections reports	PERMANENT

A "Closed" file that stores the paperwork for facilities that have closed and are no longer in business is essential. These records can be used for preliminary information for a prospective new owner and to refresh your memory of a facility's deficiencies. If there is a change in facility information, a new record may need to be created. A change in name may be an easy change to the file folder; however, if a name change includes new ownership, it would be best to create a new file.

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For DHSS staff, departmental policies in the Administrative Manual, including but not limited to, section 11.6 Confidential Records and Information, must be followed. Any BERL personnel receiving requests for information under the provisions of the Sunshine Law are to immediately forward them to the Section Administrator.

The “Sunshine Law” which must be adhered to by all governmental bodies, is addressed in section 30.14 of the DHSS Administrative Manual. DHSS Policies and Procedures Manuals may be accessed from the DHSS Intranet homepage.